



Fundacion Respeta Mi debuts their website for all ages

This past Monday afternoon the Fundacion Respeta Mi welcomed educators, Community Police, social workers, and concerned parents to a gathering in the Surfside Marina to present their new website, which was over a year under construction. The Fundacion Respeta Mi, celebrating fifteen years of serving the community is devoted to the education, awareness, and prevention of child abuse. Worldwide, this is a subject that is often not only ignored, but communities often tend to be in denial that it takes place. As Enid di Kort, president of the Foundation Respeta Mi, and Dina Mueller, Director of the Imeldahoff, a halfway house for children from troubled homes, acknowledge that even Arubans have to recognize and deal with this problem and the consequences to society.

To this end, the foundation, with the financial assistance of the Friends of the Handicapped, McDonald's Aruba, N.V. and Office Systems Aruba have established a website in Papiamentu. It is a place where children of varying age groups can find information that will help them understand and recognize when they are in an abusive situation. It also has a section for adults, such as educators, which will instruct and assist them in recognizing when they may have a child under their care that is a possible victim of abuse. This colorfully attractive website, in easy to understand graphics and language for all ages was created by ex-IPA students Javier Hernandez and Jessica Kelly, who with love, dedicated over a year to the project. Designers Ron Wever y Nino Maduro devised entertaining caricatures that would depict situations that children can recognize, and so realize that what is happening to them is *not their fault*, and how very important it is to talk to someone when they suspect they being abused. The site details in all the possible ways a child can be damaged, whether physical beating, sexual, or mental abuse.

Dina Muller acknowledged that amongst the children that are housed at the Imeldahoff, she believes that thirty percent have suffered sexual abuse, and nearly ninety percent have suffered abuse of some kind. "The negative effects of these situations are long term, with the abusive behavior often being passed down from one generation to the next. Every attempt must be made to recognize it and stop it," she asserted.

The launching of the website coincides with the issuing of an attractive poster that informs the island's youth that they can log on to www.respetami.aw for information, or that they can call The Youth Hotline, telephone #131 for help, or just to talk, if they are troubled.

All communities must face the problem of child abuse, and even in Aruba, as Community Policeman Marlon Pieters expressed, "we have our share." Those present on Monday acknowledged that child abuse is a crime not only against the helpless child, but also against society and the future, for the psychological damage it does, and the long-term consequences of such actions. Ignoring the problem is a crime also.

Denying that it could happen in one's community will only help it to perpetuate, and this is damaging to us all. The work of the Fundacion Respeta Mi should be applauded, and every teacher that suspects they have an abused student, or good neighbor that suspects there is an abused child in their community must examine this website and encourage others to do so.